



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control



House Breaking your Dog

Bringing home a new puppy is truly one of life's joys. Thoughtful pre-puppy preparations and a well-planned first 24 hours can give your fuzzy bundle of promise a head start and make your dreams of the perfect family dog come true.

Before the big day

Once household discussions have established that everyone wants a dog of a certain age and breed, where to get the pup - from a shelter or reputable breeder - is more or less determined. Now, family meetings should cover scheduling:

- Who will take the pup to the papers or backyard and when?
- Who will be in charge of feedings 3- 4 times a day?
- Who will make veterinary appointments for vaccinations and de-worming?

Also, take time to create a vocabulary list everyone will use. If Mom says "down" when Puppy climbs on the couch, Dad says "down" when he wants him to lie down and Junior utters "sit down" when he expects the pup's rear to hit the floor, the result will be one confused dog! Putting the schedule and vocabulary list in writing prevents

confusion and will help dog walkers, nannies and others involved in raising Puppy.

Next, draft a shopping list and purchase supplies: food and water bowls, chew toys, grooming supplies, bedding, collar and leash, identification tag, crate, gate and odor neutralizer. Pre-puppy shopping allows you to order from wholesale catalogs or visit the pet superstore in the next county without the pressure of Puppy needing it right now.

You'll need to puppy-proof the area where the youngster will spend most of his time the first few months. This may mean taping electrical cords to baseboards, storing household chemicals on high shelves, removing plants, rugs and breakables, setting up the crate and installing gates. Once you think you've completely puppy-proofed, lay on the floor and look around once more to get a puppy's eye view.

If you have children, hold one last meeting to lay down the rules: Don't overwhelm Pup the first day, and don't fight over him or create mob scenes showing him to the neighborhood. Now you're off to get Puppy.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs,
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Getting off on the right paw

When you pick up your pup, remember to ask what and when he was fed. Replicate that schedule for at least the first few days to avoid gastric distress. If you wish to switch to a different brand, do so over a period of about a week by adding 1 part new brand to 3 parts of the old for several days; then switch to equal parts, and then 1 part old to 3 parts new.

From the start, consistency is important. On the way home, Puppy should ride in the back seat, either in one person's arms or, preferably, in a crate or carrier.

Once home, folks who plop the excited newcomer on the Oriental and let the kids chase him will be mopping up in no time - and regretting the lesson they taught their new pup. Instead, take him to his toileting area immediately.

From there, carry out your schedule for feeding, toileting, napping and play/exercise. From Day One, your pup will need family time and brief periods of solitary confinement. Solitude may be new to Puppy, so he may vocalize concern. Don't give in and comfort him or you may create a monster. "Gee, if making noise brought them running once, maybe more whimpering is needed to get their attention again," reasons the pup. Give him attention for good behavior, such as chewing on a toy or resting quietly.

Doing things correctly from the start prevents confusion. Through puppy preparedness, you are one step closer to your Dream Dog.

The Potty Wars

In an ideal world, puppies come from a highly reputable source, where someone keeps the litter area clean at all times. A new caretaker has a fenced-in yard to which no other dogs have access, and a stay-at-home schedule that allows frequent potty trips to that yard. Under these circumstances, most dogs are housebroken in only a few weeks. However, most of us live in the Real World

Real people, real pets

In the Real World, our puppies may have spent enough time in a second-rate facility, puppy mill or pet shop to become accustomed to lying in their waste, which makes crate training difficult. We may hold jobs that preclude a schedule compatible with a puppy's developmental needs, or live in housing without fenced-in yards, thus forcing us to paper-train until our pups are fully immunized. The further a lifestyle varies from the ideal, the greater the challenge housebreaking is.

Real World housetraining requires a strategy based on three components:

1. Consistency: a consistent walking schedule catered to the dog's developmental stage and individual preferences.
2. Confinement: a method that helps build bladder and bowel control
3. Cleaning: a good enzymatic odor neutralizer to clean up accidents.

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What is a suitable schedule? Puppies can control them-selves roughly one hour for each month of age, up to nine or ten hours. At three and a half to four months, they can usually stay clean for six to seven hours overnight, but soil more frequently during the day. Three walks a day is fine for most dogs eight months or older

A puppy usually needs to eliminate after waking, eating and exercising. Charting his output will help you predict his needs more accurately. Does he soil 5 or 15 minutes after dinner, 2 or 10 after waking?

Hold it! For the first few weeks in a new home, a new puppy may seem like a pee-and-poop machine, but as he matures and develops muscle tone, he will learn to control himself for longer periods between potty trips. Confinement, preferably in a training crate, builds control by associating the pup's distaste for soiling in his special area with soiling inside the house in general. It is patently unfair to crate a pup for longer than he is physically able to control himself. In these cases, confine him to a small space such as a bathroom or kitchen with papers at one end and a bed and toys at the other. It slows the housebreaking process and confuses the dog a bit, but it is the best option, short of hiring a pet sitter, if no one can be home with the puppy during an average work day.

Whether using papers or a yard, the pup should wear a leash and collar and remain under your control. If you don't acclimate the pup to your presence while he's relieving himself, you may create a dog who won't soil in front of you but waits until he's back in the house and can disappear behind the sofa or under the dining room table. Do not allow

puppies access to carpeting, especially wall-to-wall, when it nears time to eliminate, for they often return to and re-anoint accidents here. Should an accident occur, get out the odor neutralizer immediately and clean, clean, clean.

For the average dog, that's really all there is to house-breaking - well-timed walks, confinement and a good cleaner when all else fails. It sounds so simple; but if it were, related problems wouldn't be rated number one on our Behavior Help line hit parade.

I. "My dog eliminates in her crate."

There are two common causes for crate soiling. *First*, the crate may be too large for current housebreaking purposes, thus allowing your dog to soil at one end and lie high and dry at the other. *Second*, bedding in the crate may be acting like a diaper, wicking offensive waste away.

The solutions are easy! If the crate is too large, reduce its size with a barrier that blocks off excess room. The pup should have just enough room to stand up, turn around in a circle and stretch out. As for bedding, your dog must earn it by keeping her crate clean for approximately seven days. When she accomplishes that, add thin bedding, such as a sheet or worn towel. If that too stays clean, then you are safe to add whatever bedding you like.

However, if the problem stems from behavior learned during an extended stay at a pet shop, you will probably need to work hands-on with a professional trainer to develop a customized protocol.

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II. "No matter how long we stay outside, my dog waits until we are home to soil."

This problem is common in urban dogs who were paper-trained until they were fully immunized. Most folks paper-train by putting down papers in one spot, taking the puppy to the spot until the dog seems to "get it," then leaving the dog in peace to eliminate. The puppy learns that housebreaking means going to a particular place in private to soil. The papers are almost incidental. Avoid this problem by simulating outdoor walking habits indoors. Put down the papers on a schedule instead of leaving them out constantly, and place them in a few different places instead of just one. Take your pup to the papers on leash, teaching her a toileting command such as *"Do your business,"* and praise her for a job well done. This routine easily transfers to walks outdoors.

II. "My dog keeps me outside for hours before he goes!"

Some folks walk their pups just until they eliminate and then promptly turn around and head for home. In no time, dogs learn that they can extend the fun only if they can "hold" themselves. A walk should be the reward for soiling. When you leave your home, take your dog immediately to a suitable toileting spot, such as a lamp post, patch of grass or curb in front of a fire hydrant. It's helpful if this is a spot other dogs use. Issue your potty command. Circle the spot with your dog for 5 minutes, 10 minutes tops. If he urinates, praise and go play. If he holds, go right back in and crate him. Try again in an hour or two. Before you know it, you should have a dog who will soil on command in his spot.

IV. "My dog was housebroken, but when he turned nine-months-old, he started baptizing the sofa near the window."

As a male dog matures and begins to lift his leg, he marks his territory, leaving olfactory messages for other canines. Consider castration, since an unneutered male is more likely to engage in marking behavior than a neutered one. A well-timed verbal correction when he is lifting his leg is helpful, too. Confinement will once again be necessary when he is alone until the problem is resolved.

The Potty Wars too often make adversaries of dogs and their caretakers. It should be a battle waged together, on the same side, because the spoils of this war - a clean and dry home - spell victory for all parties concerned.